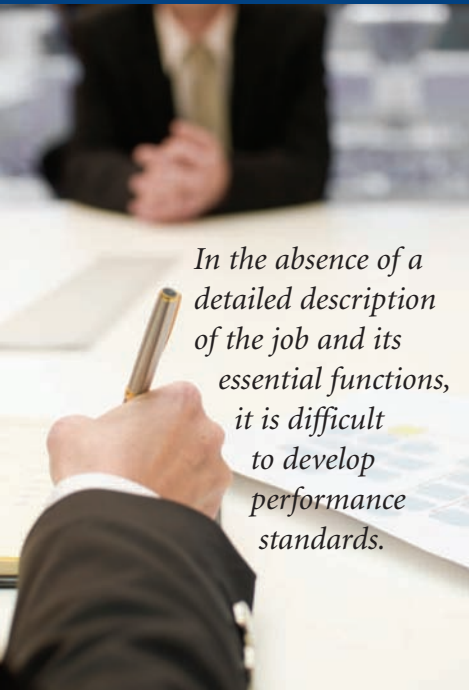


Employment Practices *Update*

Bringing important information to emergency service organizations

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E-mail: epupdate.opinion@vfis.com



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Job Descriptions: *Develop, Integrate, and Update*

Michael J. McCall, J.D.

Establishing accurate and detailed job descriptions is an integral aspect of managing employees and volunteers. Job descriptions serve as a guide for hiring/selection, setting expectations, delegating duties, performance management, coaching and counseling, and legal compliance. This article provides tools for emergency service organizations (ESOs) in developing, integrating and updating job descriptions.

Why Job Descriptions Are Relevant

Regardless of whether your ESO is composed of employees, volunteers, or both, it is essential to develop job descriptions. Written and published job descriptions are important to ESOs, their members, and job applicants for a variety of reasons.

Hiring/Selection - Set expectations for applicants for employment with or membership in your ESO. Making an accurate job or position description available to candidates helps clarify job duties, define physical and mental functions necessary, and establish minimum qualifications, as well as communicate time and training requirements. Make use of job descriptions when advertising for a position.

When practical, use job descriptions as a tool in planning for candidate interviews. Take time to formulate questions directly from the requirements and qualifications listed in the job description. This will help your ESO ensure that interview questions don't broach legally dangerous topics such as pregnancy, religion, or marital status and that similar questions are posed for every applicant for a position to demonstrate selection is based on comparative skills, qualifications, and abilities.

Orientation - Once a position has been filled within your organization, the job description will help let the member know what to expect. New workers are likely a bit uncertain, and integrating a well-structured job description in the orientation process will help communicate priorities and define position expectations.

Performance Management/Evaluation - In the absence of a detailed description of the job and its essential functions, it is difficult to develop performance standards. It is recommended that job descriptions be made an integral part of the performance management or evaluation process. By using job descriptions, every ESO member in the same position will be measured on the same objective performance factors. This helps build consistency throughout the organization in managing performance. Moreover, personnel relations are strengthened because subjectivity is reduced in the performance management or evaluation process.

The annual performance management or evaluation process also provides an excellent opportunity for those currently holding the position to review and provide suggestions for updating the job description. This allows a member and supervisor to work together to reprioritize job tasks, time allocation, and goals.

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leaders should seek assistance from human resources professionals from within or outside the organization when developing job descriptions. Also, the ESO should always consult with legal counsel familiar with emergency services and local labor and employment laws.

Tips for Developing Job Descriptions

Below are additional suggestions for what may be included in comprehensive and useful job descriptions:

1. **Job title** - Clarifies the position, title, level and rank (if appropriate).
2. **Statement of purpose and objectives of the position** - A couple of sentences providing a general overview of the position's purpose and objectives. The particular contributions of the job to the organization's overall mission should be documented.
3. **Job qualifications** - Description of the minimum education, experience, and skills necessary to perform the job.
4. **Reporting structure** - Description of the position's chain of command, including supervisory roles (if any) of the position and to whom the person in the position reports.
5. **Job description** - A detailed list of specific duties and tasks, typically in order of significance. In this, the essential physical and mental functions (job duties or requirements) are commonly separated from the non-essential or marginal job tasks. Essential functions are routinely and typically performed and are often highly specialized functions, and the position exists to perform these essential functions (serious consequences if not performed). Non-essential or marginal tasks are less important, less frequently necessary, and more easily reassigned to other workers.
6. **Quality and quantity of work expected.**
7. **Special working conditions** - Clarification as to whether the position demands shift, overtime, or as-needed work. Also lists work-related hazards and environmental conditions.
8. **Changing duties** - A statement should be included that says when duties and responsibilities change, the job description will be reviewed and subject to modification due to business necessity.
9. **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)** - A statement about whether the position is exempt or non-exempt.
10. **"And Other Duties as Assigned"** - A statement saying that, while the job description outlines the major responsibilities of the job, other assignments and duties may be required.

Conclusion

ESO leaders are encouraged to develop job descriptions and integrate them into the organization's personnel processes. Updating job descriptions allows for the written documents to accurately reflect the positions and keep members involved in defining their integral roles within the ESO.

Job Descriptions: Develop, Integrate, and Update

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Coaching, Counseling, and Discipline - Position descriptions help provide written guidance for ESO members as to how they should be spending their work time, what are the most important job responsibilities, and generally what is required of them. For members who are either exceeding performance expectations or struggling to improve, the job description helps establish a benchmark for how the performance "should be". If a worker's performance gets off track, the supervisor can utilize the job description as a tool for coaching and counseling. The goals are to again focus on essential job duties, improve performance, and avoid turnover.

Legal Risks - Written job descriptions provide evidence that personnel decisions are based on rational, business-needs-oriented grounds. By not maintaining detailed job descriptions, your ESO may be putting itself in legal jeopardy. The current status of your ESO's job descriptions will likely impact liability exposures, including disability discrimination, wrongful termination or dismissal, retaliation, or constructive discharge.

In regard to potential disability exposures, pay particular attention to a job description defining the essential physical and mental requirements of a job or position. Do your ESO's job descriptions define the essential physical and mental requirements of the job? The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that employees be able to perform the essential physical and mental requirements of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation. ESO employees and volunteers must be able to perform these essential functions of the job without putting themselves, coworkers, or other citizens at risk of imminent harm. For compliance purposes, it is recommended that your ESO leaders consult with legal counsel familiar with labor and employment matters when developing and updating job descriptions.

Who Should Develop Job/Position Descriptions?

Developing job or position descriptions may seem to be a daunting task. However, by soliciting the assistance of those individuals presently occupying the positions, the development process will be expedited and bring more accurate results. ESO